

## Statement on the Death of Boris Yeltsin *April 23, 2007*

Laura and I are deeply saddened by the death of former Russian President Boris Yeltsin. President Yeltsin was an historic figure who served his country during a time of momentous change. He played a key role as the Soviet Union dissolved, helped lay the foundations of freedom in Russia,

and became the first democratically elected leader in that country's history. I appreciate the efforts that President Yeltsin made to build a strong relationship between Russia and the United States. We offer our sincerest condolences to the Yeltsin family and to the Russian people.

## Statement on the Identity Theft Task Force Report *April 23, 2007*

I commend Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission Deborah Majoras for their work on the Identity Theft Task Force report released today. The report is the culmination of many months of hard work by numerous Federal Agencies. Identity

theft is a serious problem in America, and my administration is working to combat this crime and to assist its victims. I thank the Attorney General, the Chairman, and their staffs for taking on this difficult and important assignment.

## Remarks on Congressional Action on Emergency Supplemental Appropriations *April 24, 2007*

Good morning. Seventy-eight days ago, I sent Congress a request for emergency war funding that our troops urgently need. I made it clear to Democratic leaders on Capitol Hill that I'm willing to discuss our differences on the way forward in Iraq. But I also made it clear, our troops should not be caught in the middle of that discussion.

Yesterday Democratic leaders announced that they plan to send me a bill that will fund our troops only if we agree to handcuff our generals, add billions of dollars in unrelated spending, and begin to pull out of Iraq by an arbitrary date. I'm disappointed that the Democratic leadership has chosen this course.

The bill they announced yesterday includes some of the worst parts of the measures they had earlier passed with narrow majorities in the House and the Senate. They know I'm going to veto a bill containing these provisions, and they know that my veto will be sustained. But instead of fashioning a bill I could sign, the Democratic leaders chose to further delay funding our troops, and they chose to make a political statement. That's their right, but it is wrong for our troops, and it's wrong for our country.

To accept the bill proposed by the Democratic leadership would be to accept

a policy that directly contradicts the judgment of our military commanders. I strongly believe that the Democrats' proposal would undermine our troops and threaten the safety of the American people here at home. And here is why.

First, a proposal would mandate the withdrawal of American troops beginning as early as July 1st of this year, and no later than October 1st of this year, despite the fact that General Petraeus has not yet received all the reinforcements he needs. It makes no sense to tell the enemy when you start to plan withdrawing. If we were to do so, the enemy would simply mark their calendars and begin plotting how to take over a country when we leave.

We know what could happen next. Just as Al Qaida used Afghanistan as a base to plan attacks of September the 11th, Al Qaida could make Iraq a base to plan even more deadly attacks. The lesson of 9/11 is that allowing terrorists to find a sanctuary anywhere in the world can have deadly consequences on the streets of our own cities.

Precipitous withdrawal from Iraq is not a plan to bring peace to the region or to make our people safer at home. Instead, it would embolden our enemies and confirm their belief that America is weak. It could unleash chaos in Iraq that could spread across the entire region. It would be an invitation to the enemy to attack America and our friends around the world. And ultimately, a precipitous withdrawal would increase the probability that American troops would one day have to return to Iraq and confront an enemy that's even more dangerous.

Second, the Democratic leadership's proposal is aimed at restricting the ability of our generals to direct the fight in Iraq. They've imposed legislative mandates—they passed legislative mandates telling them which enemies they can engage and which they cannot. That means our commanders in the middle of a combat zone would have to take fighting directions from legislators

6,000 miles away on Capitol Hill. The result would be a marked advantage for our enemies and a greater danger for our troops.

Third, the bill proposed by Democratic leaders would spend billions of dollars on projects completely unrelated to the war. Proposed legislation does remove some of the most egregious porkbarrel projects that Democratic leaders had inserted in earlier bills. Yet it still includes huge amounts of domestic spending that has no place in an emergency war funding bill. We should debate those provisions on their own merits, during the normal process. But funding for our troops should not be held hostage while that debate unfolds.

I know that Americans have serious concerns about this war. People want our troops to come home, and so do I. But no matter how frustrating the fight can be and no matter how much we wish the war was over, the security of our country depends directly on the outcome in Iraq. The price of giving up there would be paid in American lives for years to come. It would be an unforgivable mistake for leaders in Washington to allow politics and impatience to stand in the way of protecting the American people.

Last November, the American people said they were frustrated and wanted change in our strategy in Iraq. I listened. Today, General David Petraeus is carrying out a strategy that is dramatically different from our previous course. The American people did not vote for failure, and that is precisely what the Democratic leadership's bill would guarantee.

It's not too late for Congress to do the right thing and to send me a bill that gives our troops and their commanders the funds and flexibility they need. I'm willing to meet with leaders in Congress as many times as it takes to resolve our differences. Yet if the Democratic leaders insist on using the bill to make a political statement, they will leave me with only one option:

I will veto it. And then I'll work with Congress to pass a clean bill that funds our troops without handcuffing our commanders, spending billions of dollars unrelated to the war, and forcing our Nation to withdraw on the enemy's terms.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

## Remarks at the Harlem Village Academy Charter School in New York City April 24, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you for the warm welcome. I appreciate you making a Texan feel right at home here in Harlem. [Laughter] I have had a remarkable experience here at Harlem Village Academy Charter School.

You know, it's interesting, one of the children said: "Why here? Why did you come here, Mr. President? Of all the schools in the country, why this school?" And my answer is, because the President has an opportunity to herald excellence, and I have seized that opportunity. I have come to a school where some may say, "These children can't possibly exceed high standards," but, in fact, they are. Secondly, I wanted to be nice to the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee.

I think any time I can thank a teacher, I need to do so. So for the teachers here, thank you for teaching; for the principals—[applause].

Interestingly enough, this week is called National Charter School Week—I mean, next week is called National Charter School Week, so a good way to herald National Charter School Week is, come to a charter school, particularly one that's working. I'm a big believer in charter schools. I think charter schools make a lot of sense, whether it be here in Harlem or anywhere else in the United States.

And so a way to express support for a charter school is to come to one that's working and say to people, if you find ex-

cellence, you might want to take a look at why, what is it about this school that enables a parent to say, I really enjoy sending my child here. Or what is it about this school, where a child looks at the President and says, I don't mind being tested, because I know that they're going to help correct problems early, before it's too late. This school is working, and I appreciate you letting me come to talk about not only this school but also about an important piece of legislation called the No Child Left Behind Act.

Before I do so, I thank Deborah for being what I call an educational entrepreneur. That means that—[applause]. So I said to Deborah—you know, I've never met Deborah before, and I said, how did you get involved in this school? She had a personal tragedy, and rather than allowing the personal tragedy to drag her down, she said: "I want to make a contribution. And I can't think of a better contribution than to help start a charter school"—as a matter of fact, not only one but two. I also thought it was interesting, she said: "If you're going to be somebody who helps start charter schools and works to make charter schools excellent, that you better be on the frontlines of education." So she became the principal of this school.

If you're interested in helping your community—whether you be an individual, such as a Deborah, or a corporation, for example—promote school excellence, do